Trends and patterns of emerging drugs in Kenya: A case study of Mombasa and Nairobi counties

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Introduction

The term "drugs of abuse" usually brings to mind traditional street drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine. The drug scene is however constantly evolving with abusers turning to less known, more accessible, and often licit and illicit substances. Emerging psychoactive substances are not controlled but are believed to cause similar or worse harm to those that are controlled. Many people particularly the youth take these drugs to get a 'high', without realizing the side effects. The rate at which these drugs are being developed is faster than they can be tracked.

The study was conducted in the year 2012. The aim was to determine the trends and patterns of emerging drug use in Mombasa and Nairobi counties in Kenya.The study sought to determine the magnitude, characteristics and impact of emerging drug use, identify the policy gaps in tackling emerging drugs and describe the interventions required to minimise their harmful effects.

Methodology

A cross-sectional and exploratory study design was used where both quantitative and qualitative data were generated. Non-probability sampling methods (snowballing and purposive sampling) were used to identify the respondents. The study was conducted in Nairobi and Mombasa counties covering 702 respondents. The respondents were drug users from Mvita, Kisauni, Changamwe and Likoni in Mombasa County and Starehe, Westlands, Eastlands and Langata in Nairobi County.

Findings

- Forty one (41) different types emerging drugs were identified in Nairobi and Mombasa counties.
- Nairobi County reported more emerging drugs (32 different types) compared to Mombasa County (21 different types).
- The emerging drugs identified were mostly stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens or prescription medicine.
- *Kuber*, *shisha*, *shashaman*, *mau*, *jet fuel*, *kukumanga*, *mkorogo*, *mshomoro* and *kamusi* reported a high prevalence of abuse in both counties.
- *Kuber* and *shisha* were the most commonly used emerging drugs in both counties.
- *Kuber* use was significantly higher in Mombasa County (21.2%) compared to Nairobi County (15.4%).
- However *shisha* use was comparable for both Nairobi and Mombasa counties at 14.3% and 14.0% respectively.

- Emerging drugs were being abused because of their 'quick high'
- Over 80% of the respondents reported that these drugs were easily accessible and the common sources included streets, drug dens and drug selling outlets.
- The emerging drugs were mostly consumed in public entertainment venues, drug dens nightclubs and hotels.
- Emerging drugs were used in combination with other drugs like bhang, alcohol, tobacco and prescription medicine.
- The most commonly used prescription drugs reported included valium, rohypnol, artane and piriton.
- However, abuse of prescription medicine was significantly higher in Nairobi County compared to Mombasa County.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:
- There is urgent need for continuous monitoring to identify emerging drugs and investigate their effects. This would provide evidence based approaches towards their regulation and control.
- There is need for continuous public education and awareness on the effects of emerging drugs by the relevant agencies. Such information would cushion the public against the adverse effects of such drugs.
- The sale of emerging drugs and substances of abuse that are sold legally e.g. *shisha* and *kuber* should be controlled for the under age children and producers should be compelled to adhere to all specific labelling requirements.

For more information on the survey findings, please visit the NACADA's Website: **www.nacada.go.ke**